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Issued Monthly

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PART 18 VOLUME 2

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MASTERS IN ART

A SERIES OF ILLUSTRATED MONOGRAPHS: ISSUED MONTHLY

PART 18 JUNE, 1901 VOLUME 2

Corot

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Photo-Engravings by Folsom and Sunergren: Boston. Press-work by the Everett Press: Boston.

PUBLISHERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Subscription price, $1.50 a year, in advance, postpaid to any address in the United States or Canada: to foreign countries in the Postal Union, $2.00. Single copies, 15 cents. Subscriptions may begin with any issue, but as each yearly volume of the magazine commences with the January number, and as index-pages, bindings, etc., are prepared for complete volumes, intending subscribers are advised to date their subscriptions from January.

REMITTANCES: Remittances may be made by Post Office money-order, bank cheque, express order, or in postage stamps. Currency sent by mail usually comes safely, but should be securely wrapped, and is at the risk of the sender.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS: When a change of address is desired, both the old and the new addresses should be given, and notice of the change should reach this office not later than the fifteenth of the month to affect the succeeding issue. The publishers cannot be responsible for copies lost through failure to notify them of such changes.

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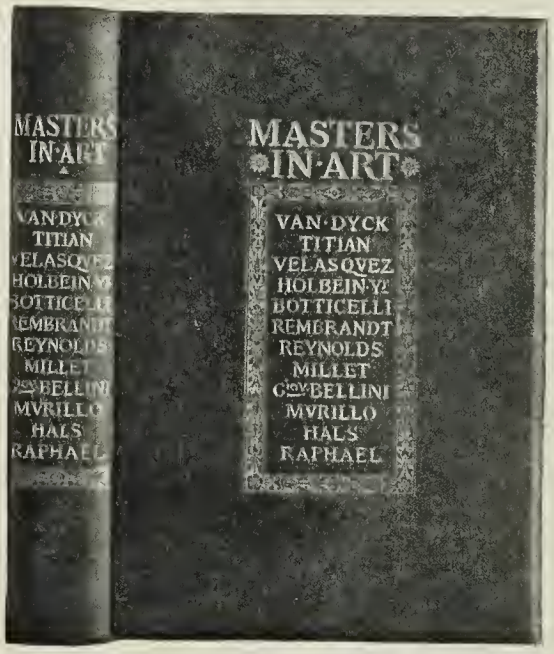

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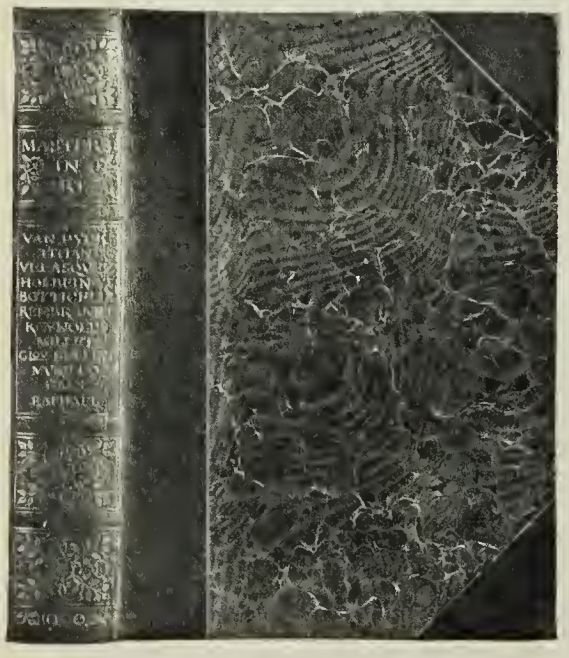

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MASTERS IN ART PLATE I

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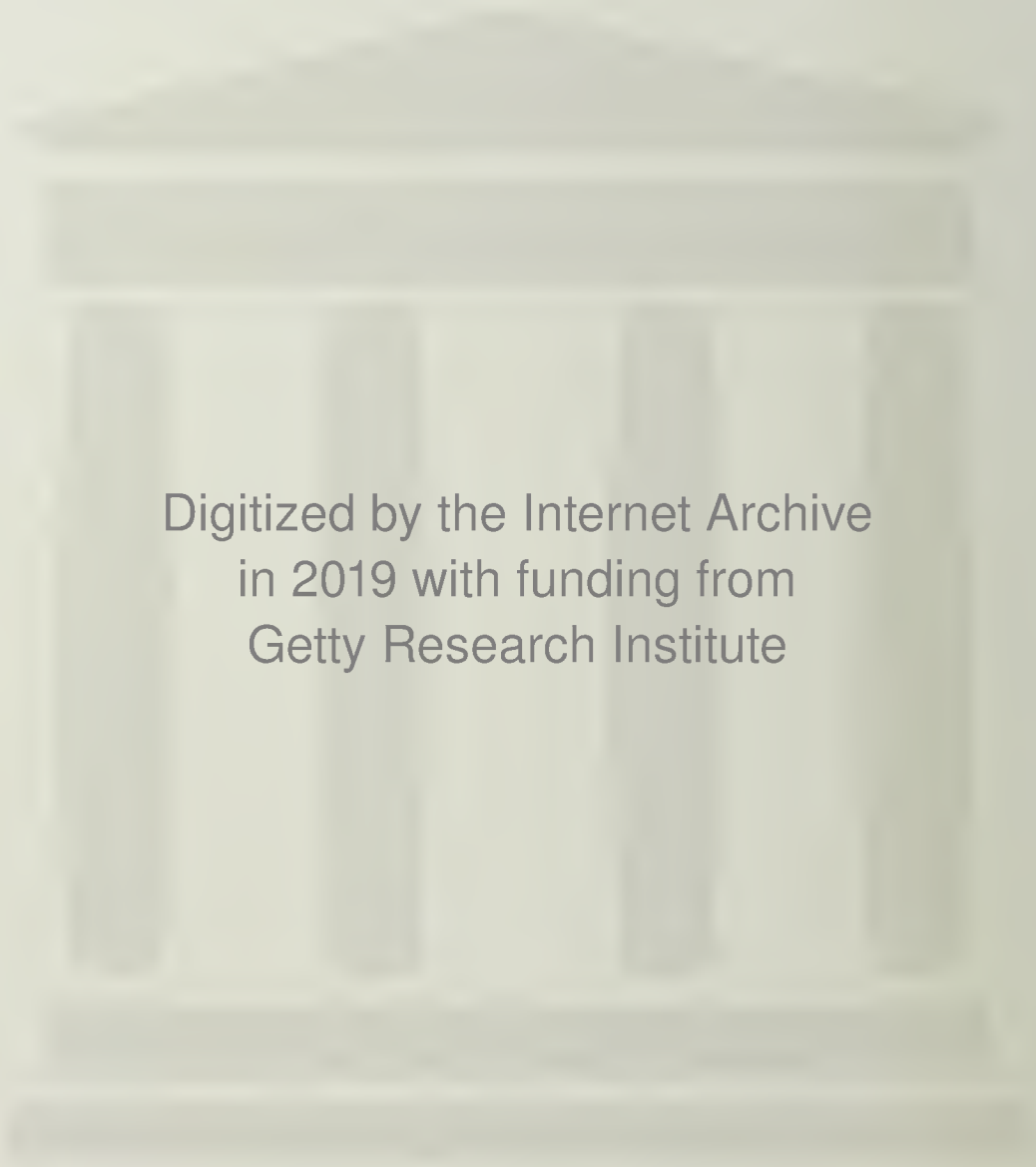
COROT

DANCE OF NYMPHS, EVENING

PRIVATE COLLECTION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COROT
LANDSCAPE
LOUVRE, PARIS

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COROT
ORPHEUS GREETING THE MORN
PRIVATE COLLECTION

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COROT
THE BATHERS
PRIVATE COLLECTION

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COROT
A ROAD IN SUNSHINE
PRIVATE COLLECTION

MASTERS IN ART PLATE VI
PHOTOGRAPH BY BRAUN, CLÉMENT & CIE.

COROT
A GUST OF WIND
PRIVATE COLLECTION

MASTERS IN ART PLATE VII

PHOTOGRAPH BY GAVET

COROT

VILLE D'AVRAY

ROUEN MUSEUM

MASTERS IN ART PLATE VIII

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COROT
THE BENT TREE
PRIVATE COLLECTION

MASTERS IN ART PLATE X

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRAUN, CLÉMENT & CIE.

COROT

DANCE OF NYMPHS, MORNING

LOUVRE, PARIS

PORTRAIT OF COROT FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY PETIT, PARIS

Corot was a man of herculean build and fine physique. Frank and genial in manner, he had a kindly expression which was very winning. His eyes were dark blue, his hair white, and his face smooth shaven. There was usually a smile upon his lips, but in repose his mouth showed strength of will, as well as a trace of melancholy. Erect in carriage, ruddy and well-favored, he looked at first sight more like a prosperous farmer than a painter-poet.

Jean Baptiste Camille Corot

BORN 1796: DIED 1875
FRENCH SCHOOL

HENRI DUMESNIL 'COROT: SOUVENIRS INTIMES'

JEAN BAPTISTE CAMILLE COROT was born in Paris on July 26, 1796. His father kept a shop at the corner of the rue du Bac and the quai Voltaire, where were sold millinery and ribbons, or, as Corot used to express it, "frivolities and gewgaws, which gave us a living and even quite a little fortune." He had two sisters, one of whom, Madame Forment, died young. For the other and elder, Madame Sennegon, Corot had ever a strong affection, and did not long survive her death. He himself never married.

In 1806, when Corot was ten years old, his father sent him to a boarding-school at Rouen on an arrangement by which he was received at half price. There he remained for seven years. He spent his holidays with an old friend of his father's who lived at Rouen,—a somewhat grave and solitary man, who would take the boy for long walks in the dusk of evening, through the outskirts of the city, over unfrequented roads, under the spreading trees of the open country, or along the banks of the river. The images that were then engraved on the child's mind made a deep and lasting impression. Later, after his return to Paris, he used to spend the summers at Ville d'Avray, where, in 1817, his father had bought a country house. This house was near a pond, and often the youth would remain the greater part of the night at the open window of his room, absorbed in watching the sky, the water, and the trees. Corot always felt that these early influences had given a bent to his whole artistic career.

At this early period, however, the aspirations of the young man were but dreams. His father, whom he always held in the greatest respect, placed him in the shop of a cloth merchant in the St. Honoré quarter in Paris, and later he entered another similar shop in the rue de Richelieu. Here at last his natural inclination displayed itself, and he made drawings by stealth under the counter at every leisure moment. His new master was indulgent, and facilitated his future career by assuring the elder Corot that the young fellow would never amount to anything in trade, and would much better be allowed to follow his inclination. He continued a clerk for eight years, however, and while so engaged contracted habits of order and regularity which remained with him

throughout his life. One of these habits, for example, was to rise early even in winter, and to his last days he always arrived at his studio as he had at the shop, punctually "at three minutes before eight in the morning."

While Corot was still engaged as a draper's clerk he became acquainted with the young painter Michallon, the first winner of the grand prize of Rome for landscape painting, and his love of art was fostered by this friendship. At last he took courage, and begged his father to let him give up trade and take to the brush. His father, a thrifty and successful man of business, was by no means pleased by his son's request, but finally stated conditions on which he would give his consent. "Your sisters' marriage portions were ready when they were needed," said he, "and I was hoping to soon provide you too with a good establishment, for you are old enough now to be at the head of a house; but since you refuse to continue in trade, and wish to be a painter instead, I warn you that as long as I live you will have no capital at your disposition. I will, however, make you a yearly allowance of fifteen hundred francs. Do not count on anything more, but try whether you can live on that!" Camille, much moved, thanked his father, saying that it was all that was necessary, and that this decision made him very happy.

The first day that he was free, and as soon as he had provided himself with artists' materials, he made his first study, not far from his father's house, on the steep bank of the Seine, looking toward the city. All who have had access to Corot's studio know this first study, which always hung there, carefully and lovingly preserved. He liked to tell the story of it. "While I was painting that," he used to say,—"it was thirty-five years ago,—the young girls who worked for my mother were curious to see Monsieur Camille at his new occupation, and ran from the shop to watch me paint. One, whom we will call Mademoiselle Rose, came oftener than the others. She is living still, and sometimes comes to see me;—she was here only last week. O my friends, what changes have taken place, and what thoughts they bring! My picture has not changed; it is always young, and recalls the very hour when I made it; but Mademoiselle Rose and I—what are we?"

His youthful friend Michallon was Corot's first master. The precepts that he gave his pupil may be summed up in a few words: to come face to face with nature, to endeavor to render it exactly, to paint what one sees, and to translate the impression received. The advice was good, and was almost identical with that which Corot later gave to his own pupils. Michallon, however, died when only twenty-six years old, and Corot then entered the Paris studio of Victor Bertin, a pure classicist, whose pictures have, if one may so express it, all the coldness of the stage accessories of tragedy. It was surely not under his teaching that Corot acquired the suppleness, the manner of rendering masses, the transparency of atmosphere, and the tremulous movement of foliage—in a word, his own delicate and tender way of depicting nature. Fortunately, all these qualities were already sufficiently rooted in him to resist the influence of Bertin; and the lessons received from the classicist were of value in teaching him precision of drawing and the foundations of composition.

In 1825 Corot visited Italy for the first time. At Rome he found a galaxy of young French painters, among whom were Léopold Robert, Schnetz, Aligny, Édouard Bertin, Bodinier, and others, besides Pierre Guérin, who was then the director of the French Academy in that city. The new-comer was welcomed on his merits as a "good fellow," but his work was not considered worth a thought. His sunny nature made him a favorite. He sang well, and in the evenings at the restaurant Della Lepre or at the Caffè Greco, which were the artists' usual meeting-places after the work of the day, they listened with pleasure to his songs, but paid no attention to what he had done in the way of painting. Things went on in this way, until one day Aligny, who was director of the landscape section of the Academy, happening to pass near the spot where Corot was engaged in making a study of the Colosseum, was struck with its truth, and looking at the sketch attentively, was surprised to find in it qualities of the first order. He congratulated the artist, who at first took his congratulations as a joke; but Aligny was in earnest, and the same evening repeated his remarks at the gathering of the painters, concluding with the prediction that this young man, who had until now been unnoticed, would in time be the master of them all. Aligny's praises worked a miracle, and from this moment Corot was considered an artist of worth, who had a future before him.

Sustained by the example and advice of Aligny, who had given him confidence in himself, Corot now devoted a large portion of his time to outdoor studies. The works which belong to this period are marked by firmness and precision in drawing, and strict adherence to nature. They are hard and tight in execution, and nothing is left to the imagination as in his later works.

Upon his return to Paris in 1827, Corot exhibited for the first time at the Salon, and thenceforth until his death he never left the battle-field of the exhibitions. For him, indeed, it was a battle, and a long one. He was alone, ranged under no banner. He wished to be truthful, but at the same time felt within himself a poetic fire which demanded expression, and could not be content with the mere translation of material things, or in an exclusive naturalism, however strong. Consequently his works were unnoticed and treated almost with contempt.

About 1833 he went again to Italy, but this time his travels were confined to the northern part of that country, and he did not journey even so far south as Rome, because of his father's distress at his prolonged absence. In 1843 he made a third visit to Italy, but remained only five or six months. The rest of his life was spent in France. He lived in Paris during the winter, and at Ville d'Avray in summer.

At the close of the Salon of 1846, at which his 'View of the Forest of Fontainebleau' was exhibited, Corot was awarded the decoration of the Legion of Honor. He was at this time in his fiftieth year. Hereafter his way lay in broad sunlight, although he was still far from being accepted by the "idolatrous and enthusiastic crowd," to use his own words, that afterwards besieged his studio in the rue de Paradis-Poissonnière, in Paris. Even his father, who had always looked upon him as a very poor painter, could not for a long time believe in his son's genius, and one day asked Français—

one of Corot's pupils who had already gained a reputation—if Camille *really* had any talent. "Tell me the truth," said he, "for you know what painting is." And even then Français found it hard to persuade the old man that his son Camille was "stronger than all the others."

Corot was nearly sixty before public favor was accorded him to any marked extent, and seventy-one before he was made an officer of the Legion of Honor. His fellow artists were the first to appreciate him. In his later years, when success had come to him, he loved to recall the chances and changes which had befallen his various pictures. For instance, one which was exhibited at the Salon of 1851 was badly placed, and every one passed by without noticing it. Corot, seeing that no one paid any attention to his landscape, said to himself, "Men are like flies; as soon as one lights on a dish others immediately follow. Perhaps if I stand here before my picture and seem to admire it others will stop too." True enough, a young couple soon approached the picture, and the gentleman said, "That is not bad; it seems to me there is something in that painting." But his wife, a sweet-looking woman, pulled him by the arm, saying, "It is frightful; do come away!" "Well," said Corot to himself, "are you satisfied, now that you know the opinion of the public? So much the worse for you!" After remaining for several years in his studio without attracting any one, this same picture was finally bought for seven hundred francs; later, at a public sale, for twelve thousand; and this time the purchaser was so delighted to have it that he gave a fête in honor of the occasion. But it was the selfsame picture that once no one wanted. "I am doing the same things to-day," said Corot, "but now the public run after them. Only forty years of work have been necessary to bring that about! It is not I who have changed, but my principles have triumphed, and now *je nage dans le bonheur*."

During the Franco-Prussian War, Corot, foreseeing the siege of Paris, returned to the city in August, 1870, and remained there during the siege. "I took refuge in my painting," said he in speaking of those days, "and I worked hard; otherwise I believe I should have gone mad." But while busy with his painting he did not forget the wounded and their needs. He visited them and comforted them by his sympathy and kindness, and allowed them to want for nothing that it was possible for him to procure. Indeed Corot opened his purse at all times so freely that he had regular clients, the frequency of whose visits he did not seem to realize. He would go to his table-drawer, take out the amount asked for, and give it to the solicitor as a matter of course. A friend who was present on one of these occasions exclaimed at his prodigal generosity. "Not at all," replied Corot. "It is my temperament and my pleasure. I can earn the money again so quickly, just by making a little branch. Charity always brings me in more than it costs, for I work better with a heart at ease. Once I gave away a thousand francs,—a good deal for my little hoard just then,—but the very next day I sold a picture for six thousand. You see it brought me good fortune; and that 's the way it always is."

So modest was Corot in his estimate of the pecuniary value of his works

that at last his friends remonstrated with him, and insisted that he should raise his prices. His reply, when he at length succumbed to their importunities, was characteristic: "Very well," he said; "go and mark the prices on them yourselves!" And so they did. Only once is he known to have asked a large sum for his work. It was in 1856, when on the day of the opening of the Salon he received a telegram from a stranger, inquiring whether a certain picture was unsold, and if so what was the price. "I do not know," Corot used to say in recounting the anecdote, "what idea possessed me; but the manner in which this sudden offer at the very opening of the Salon was made induced me to believe that a success was in store for me, and I was emboldened to a pitch of audacity. I replied, also by telegram, 'Picture unsold; price 10,000 francs.' I never did such a thing before! In an hour's time came an answering telegram, saying that my terms were accepted with pleasure. I thought at first that I must have left out a cipher in my message, but it was all right." Although he allowed his friends to have their own way about fixing the prices of his pictures, he reserved the right to give them away whenever it seemed good to him to do so. In this way the town of Semur came to possess his 'Orchard'; the church of Ville d'Avray his 'St. Jerome'; and Lille his 'Fête.'

Corot scarcely felt the weight of years. His faculties remained intact, and he knew nothing of the usual indifference of the old. His pictures in the Salon of 1874 were very beautiful, but, to the surprise of every one, did not gain him the grand medal of honor. When the award of the jury became known his friends sent him a letter expressing their admiration for his work, and their regret at the decision; and this proved to be the beginning of a movement in the art world of Paris which culminated in the presentation to the great landscapist of a gold medal, in testimony of the affection and esteem in which he was held.

In October, 1874, a great sorrow came to Corot in the death of his sister, Madame Sennegon, with whom he had always lived when he was at Ville d'Avray, and to whom he was devotedly attached. Her death was a premonition of his own approaching end. From this time on his health, until then so robust, began to fail. By the end of the following month he had become very feeble, and his appearance plainly showed that his condition was serious. He still sometimes went to his studio, for, even though he could no longer work, he liked to be among his paintings.

Corot had finished the pictures intended for the Salon of 1875, and when his failing strength obliged him to give up going to his studio they lacked only his signature. That this might be added they were brought to his bedside, and after the effort of signing them—the last touch of his brush—he said, "That is all; I can do no more." During his last moments his mind dwelt on his painting, and as if still holding a brush he moved his right arm to the wall, exclaiming, "Look! how beautiful! I have never seen such lovely landscapes!" These were almost his last words. He died on the evening of the twenty-third of February, 1875.—ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH.

The Art of Corot

W. C. BROWNELL 'FRENCH ART'

COROT is the ideal classic-romantic painter, both in temperament and in practice. Millet's subject, not, I think, his treatment,—possibly his wider range,—makes him seem more deeply serious than Corot, but he is not essentially nearly so unique. He is unrivalled in his way, but Corot is unparalleled. Corot inherits the tradition of Claude; his motive, like Claude's, is always an effect, and, like Claude's, his means are light and air. But his effect is a shade more impalpable and his means are at once simpler and more subtle. He gets farther away from the phenomena which are the elements of his ensemble—farther than Claude, farther than any one. His touch is as light as the zephyr that stirs the diaphanous drapery of his trees. It has a pure, crisp, vibrant accent, quite without analogue in the technique of landscape painting. Taking technique in its widest sense, one may speak of Corot's shortcomings—not, I think, of his failures. It would be difficult to mention a modern painter more uniformly successful in attaining his aim, in expressing what he wishes to express, in conveying his impression, communicating his sensations.

That a painter of his power, a man of the very first rank, should have been content—even placidly content—to exercise it within a range by no means narrow, but plainly circumscribed, is certainly witness of limitation. "Delacroix is an eagle; I am only a skylark," he remarked once, with his characteristic cheeriness. His range is not, it is true, as circumscribed as is generally supposed outside of France. Except in France his figure-painting, for example, is almost unknown. But compared with his landscape, in which he is unique, it is plain that he excels nowhere else. Outside of landscape his interest was clearly not real. In his other works one notes a certain debonair irresponsibility. He pursued nothing seriously but out-of-doors, its vaporous atmosphere, its crisp twigs and graceful branches, its misty distances and piquant accents,—what Thoreau calls "its inaudible panting." His true theme, lightly as he took it, absorbed him; and no one of any sensitiveness can ever regret it. His powers, following the indication of his true temperament, his most genuine inspiration, are concentrated upon the very finest thing imaginable in landscape painting; as, indeed, they must have been to reproduce as they have done the finest landscape in the history of art.

There are, however, two things worth noting in Corot's landscape beyond the mere fact that, better even than Rousseau, he expresses the essence of landscape, dwells habitually among its inspirations, and is its master rather than its servant. One is the way in which he poetizes, so to speak, the simplest sketches of sward and clumps of trees, and long clear vistas across still ponds, with distances whose accents are pricked out with white houses and yellow cows and placid fishers and ferrymen in red caps, seen in glimpses through curtains of sparse, feathery leafage; or peoples woodland openings with nymphs and fawns silhouetted against the sunset glow, or dancing in the

cool gray of dusk. A man of no reading, having only the elements of an education in the general sense of the term, his instinctive sense of what is refined was so delicate that we may say of his landscapes that, had the Greeks left any, they would have been like Corot's. And this classic and cultivated effect he secured not at all, or only very incidentally, through the force of association, by dotting his hillsides and vaporous distances with bits of classic architecture, or by summing up his feeling for the dawn in a graceful figure of Orpheus greeting with extended gesture the growing daylight, but by a subtle interpenetration of sensuousness and severity, resulting in precisely the sentiment fitly characterized by the epithet *classic*.

The other trait peculiar to Corot's representation of nature and expression of himself is his color. No painter ever exhibited, I think, quite such a sense of refinement in so narrow a gamut. Green and gray, of course, predominate and set the key; but he has an interestingly varied palette of the hither side of splendor whose subtleties are capable of giving exquisite pleasure. Never did any one use tints with such positive force. Tints with Corot have the vigor and vibration of positive colors,—his lilacs, violets, straw-colored hues, his almost Quakerish coquetry with drabs and slates and pure, clear browns, the freshness and bloom he imparted to his tones, the sweet and shrinking wild-flowers with which as a spray he sprinkled his humid dells and brook margins.

But Corot's true distinction—what gives him his unique position at the very head of landscape art—is neither his color, delicate and interesting as his color is, nor his classic serenity, harmonizing with, instead of depending upon the chance associations of architecture and mythology with which now and then he decorates his landscapes; it is the blithe, the airy, the truly spiritual way in which he gets farther away than any one from both the actual pigment that is his instrument, and from the phenomena that are the objects of his expression—in a word, his ethereality. He has communicated his sentiment almost without material, one may say, so ethereally independent of their actual analogues is the interest of his trees and sky and stretches of sward. This sentiment, thus mysteriously triumphant over color or form, or other sensuous charms (which nevertheless are only subtly subordinated, and by no means treated lightly or inadequately) is as exalted as any that has in our day been expressed in any manner.

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY 'A CENTURY OF ARTISTS'

COROT is a culmination. On his own ground he may challenge comparison with the greatest. He entered upon his career at a juncture when the classic convention, as developed by the descendants of the Poussins, was mined with decay and tottering to its fall, while as yet the forerunners of Romanticism were but groping their way towards new truths and new ideas; and it was his to unite in his art the best tendencies of both. It is to be supposed, as I have said, that his interest in pure nature and his perception of her inexhaustible suggestiveness were stimulated and determined by the revelations of certain artists who were at once his ancestors and his

contemporaries; it is at any rate certain that he was himself as ardent and curious a student of facts as has ever painted, and that the basis of his art is a knowledge of reality as deep and sound as it is rich and novel. On the other hand, the essentials of Classicism—composition, selection, treatment, the master quality of style—were his by genius and inheritance alike. In the artistic completeness of his formula he stands with Claude; in the freshness and novelty of his material, with Constable and the moderns.

In him, however, there is much that is not Claude, and much more that is not Constable. There is Corot himself: a personality as rare, exquisite, and charming as has ever found expression in the plastic arts. He had that enjoyment of his medium for its own sake denied, they tell us, even to Raphael; his sense of color was infallibly distinguished and refined; his treatment of the best type. Given such means, and no more, and it is possible to do great things. To Corot, who painted, as Jules Dupré declared, "with wings in his back, so to speak," much more was possible.

In his most careless work there is always art and there is always quality —a strain of elegance, a thrill of style, a hint of the unseen; while at his best he is not only the consummate artist, he is also the most charming of poets. If I remember aright, it is Cherbuliez who says of Mozart that he was "the only Athenian who ever wrote music." The phrase is a good one, it suggests so happily an ideal marriage of sentiment with style. With the substitution of landscape for music, it applies as happily to Corot. Corot is the Mozart of landscape.

CHARLES BIGOT 'PEINTRES FRANÇAIS CONTEMPORAINS'

COROT loved to paint the early spring, when the outmost twigs upon the branches put forth little leaves of tender green which quiver in every breath of air. He had a wonderful power of rendering the effect of the tiny blades of grass that spring up in the flower-enamelled meadows of June. He delighted in the borders of a stream where tall bushes bend towards the water, and dearly loved the water itself, with its vague outline and shimmering reflections, here dark and shadowy, there light and gleaming. He loved the sky reflected upon the pale surface of the pond or at the bend of the river, and the clouds sailing across the firmament, revealing in spaces between them spots of the clear, limpid blue of heaven. He loved those white mists which hover in early morning over the ponds and pools, disappearing like gauzy veils at the first rays of the sun. He loved the soft vapors which gather and thicken in the evening, as peace and silence descend upon the earth with the approach of night. He loved all that is subtle and floating, all that avoids absolute form and defined outlines, all that is vague and invites to reverie. What attracts plastic artists was never what attracted him; by his own acknowledgment drawing was not his forte. He almost invariably failed when he attempted to paint a figure; and the weak parts of his landscapes are the nymphs and cupids so frequently introduced, and never seen to better advantage than when so placed that only the delicate silhouettes of their half-defined forms can be discerned as they dance in the sunset glow. There was in Corot more the soul of a poet

than that of a sculptor. A poet? That is hardly enough to say. Corot's soul was more that of a musician; and music is the least plastic of all the arts. He loved music almost as passionately as he loved painting, and in speaking of his art it was from music that he liked to draw his comparisons.

Was Corot a realist? Many would no doubt deny his right to the title, for he certainly was never bent upon any exact rendering of nature, nor did he concern himself with any precision of detail; and although he worked much in the open air, he worked far more in his studio, there transcribing to canvas more than one view which he had seen, making changes whenever by changing he felt that he could produce a more harmonious result. He always had a number of unfinished canvases in his studio, on any one of which he would paint as the fancy seized him. When a tempting composition offered itself to his mind he would select that canvas best suited to his subject, and at once begin, with a firm and rapid hand, to paint what he saw in his mind's eye. M. Dumesnil tells of a picture begun as a study of Ville d'Avray and finally transformed into the poetic 'Souvenir du Lac Némi,' exhibited in the Salon of 1865. Is it really Lac Némi? Certainly not; but it is, all the same, full of freshness and poetry, and none the less charming because it exists nowhere in reality. . . .

It was therefore not always nature itself that Corot represented, but rather the impression which nature made upon him. All its varied aspects were seemingly engraved upon his soul, and what he painted was not any particular scene, but the very spirit of the scene itself,—what the poet has called "the soul of things." A dangerous method this, and one that cannot be recommended to any young artist; but at the same time a method which is allowable in an artist sure of his own power, for the reason that no unnecessary detail can then interfere with his pure poetic conception.

To sum up the general character of Corot's work, it may be said that it is one of joyousness—joyousness, freshness, and grace. He was above all a happy man; and surely no one more deserved happiness, for he had within himself the very spirit of joy. His nature was lovable and charming, his disposition always equal, and so universally was he beloved that he was called by all who knew him "Père Corot." His were a calm heart and a peaceful spirit. Passion never disturbed his soul any more than the tempest ever troubles the surface of his tranquil lakes. But the words "calm" and "peace" are not sufficient to express the master quality of his genius. The word that best describes him is *serene*. He was serene as a man, serene as an artist. What he saw above all else in nature, and what he sought to reproduce, was an impression of serenity. It is in his pure and placid ponds, in the mists which float over their surfaces, and it is in his sunsets. He loved best those serene hours just before the rising of the sun and those which follow its going down. He loved, too, the deep serenity of starlit summer nights, when every breath of wind is hushed to silence. If I may so express it, I should say that there is about Corot's landscapes something even benign, so perfect is their serenity.—ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH.

J. COMYNS CARR 'ESSAYS ON ART'

TO understand the distinctive quality of Corot's work, we must recall his own phrase: "I am only a skylark, singing little songs in my gray clouds." His pictures are in reality songs sent forth from the gray clouds that overspread the world of his art. . . .

No one has so delicately or so faithfully interpreted certain elements of landscape; and in certain effects of light and air he has been the first to attempt and to perfect pictorial expression. In looking at one of these landscapes, where the colors of the earth and sky curiously unite, the white fleecy clouds above blanching the green of leaves and grass and turning the pools of water to their own likeness, we feel as if the face of nature were as sensible to passing emotions as the human face. So refined and unobtrusive is the portraiture that the momentary aspect of the scene seems to have been unconsciously arrested. The painter has caught, in the sudden agreement of changing lights and flitting shadows, a beauty that was almost too delicate for portraiture, and has also given the sense of impending movement and the impression of a shifting and changing world. The swaying, restless trees take an uncertain outline against the white sky; the movement of the leaves blurs their image on the canvas; so that we feel not only that the artist has seized a beautiful moment, but that it is only a moment, and that the scene will pass in the next into some new harmony, wrought by the all-powerful rule of the weather.

THEODORE ROBINSON 'MODERN FRENCH MASTERS'

CLASSICAL landscape was strongly intrenched in France at the beginning of this century, and Corot inherited in direct line through his masters, Michallon and Bertin, the "Poussinesque tradition." He was, perhaps, too young in his art or too loyal to his masters to be much influenced by the little band of Englishmen, Constable, Bonington, and Fielding, whose landscapes made such a sensation in 1824 in Paris. Going to Italy the year after, he worked as Michallon had taught him, painting simply what he saw, but thoroughly in the classic spirit. His changes later on were forced upon him as a lover of nature, seeing his own shortcomings, and realizing the possibilities of a painting that should give more of nature's charm in atmosphere, light, and delicacy of feeling,—qualities that he rightly considered of more importance than accuracy, minuteness of detail, and skilfulness of execution. But Corot's manner is perhaps the least of his claims to our admiration. It was admirable, indeed, in so far as it enabled him to show forth upon canvas his joyous visions of morning skies and moving foliage, of nature never fixed nor stagnant, nature even in her calmest moods vibrating with life; but aside from that it was nothing remarkable. How he came to adopt it we can imagine from his own narration. "I arrived in Rome the merest tyro in sketching. Two men stopped to converse; I began to sketch them, beginning with one part, the head, for example. They would separate, and leave me with two scraps of heads on my paper. I resolved not to return without having *something* in its entirety. I attempted, therefore, to sketch, in the winking of an

eye, the first group that presented itself. If the figures remained in position for but a moment I had, at least, the character, the general outline; if they remained long I added details." In that quotation we have Corot's whole creed of expression. He considered the *impression* of the whole the matter of first importance, and a wise suppression of the infinity of details a necessity. Hence the unfailing unity of his pictures. He was one of the first painters who dared to maintain that a picture is finished when it gives the desired effect; and perhaps for that reason he is by many called the founder or father of the present-day Impressionistic movement.

Corot was often reproached for his souvenirs of the antique, and his work was disdained by both the Classical and the Romantic schools of his day. He was not the most intellectual of artists, and his life-work seems to me less logical than Millet's, whose more sombre art Corot frankly admitted that he could not appreciate. Millet in his youth painted charming little figures taken from mythology and classic lore, but in later years he was the consistent painter of peasant life, seen indeed through the eyes of a poet and seer. But Corot, beginning to paint under the influence of the Classic school, continued to the end of his life to people his landscapes with nymphs and dryads, though occasionally introducing, with greater realism, peasants, boatmen, and cattle. In neither case are the figures incongruous—that would have been impossible with such a consummate artist as Corot; but the variations show that he was not a thorough classicist, and the moderns have perhaps a right to claim that he made concessions to the modern spirit.

Technically, Corot is sometimes said to be a thin, superficial, and foggy painter; but the subjects he loved best to paint often precluded any severe registration of form. To demand in his foregrounds, seen through the early morning light, and covered with rank herbage and flowers, the masterly and obvious construction of a Rousseau, who loved the open and the full light of day, would be manifestly absurd. Draughtsmanship in the highest sense is as intangible a quality as color. It may be defined to be, briefly, a feeling for form and line independent of mere accuracy; and this Corot possessed in a high degree. It has been well said: "There are painters who draw more than Corot; there are none who draw better." The drawing of his figures is not academic; but how well the little groups stand or move, and how well they belong to their landscape! Even his cows, with their droll length of body, it would be possible to defend from a decorative point of view. But his *values* are faultless. Everything is in its place; you go around and between his trees; you look from point to point of his ground, receding just as it does in nature. Finally, how consummately right and beautiful are his silhouettes of trees and their distances as seen against the sky. Were ever trees so drawn before?

Corot's numerous early studies, which, as a critic once declared, "shine from their qualities of exactitude," insured a sound foundation to his art. Vigorous and uncompromising in their drawing, they gave him the right to simplify later on. He *knew;* and little by little he began to conceal that knowledge, until the observer sees in one of his landscapes only a happy improvisation. None the less, at bottom there is effort, and of the most gen-

uine kind. His whole life was spent in study — not topographic study of detail, but of the more subtle qualities of modelling and drawing, and the law of *enveloppe* and values. Nor is he careless and slovenly as a painter. At the right place he knows how to be as precise as a knife-edge, and then again how to lose and confuse details, as nature herself loses and confuses them.

Corot's long and tranquil life, his singleness of aim, and perhaps the fact that success came to him late, resulted in an art that is exceptionally individual and personal in its spirit. It shows, of course, his constant dependence on nature, but beyond that it shows the charm of a simple-minded, frank, loyal character. His art to many is a painted music. It is lyric and suggestive in the highest degree; and under the influence of certain music, before a landscape by Corot, one has varied and delightful emotions, vague as memories evoked by perfumes. As a friend, himself a poet, said, "Corot has in him all of youth; he is the poet's painter." Certainly no painter has evoked the poetry of morning and evening, the charm of air and water, of silvery mists, of woodland glades, and the serenity of summer skies, better than Corot. Before his time there was little possibility, with the then existing ideas, of a landscape which should have the charm of intimacy; and even in the work of his contemporaries, the Fontainebleau-Barbizon men, great as they are, and much as we praise and admire them, we find little to love as we love and admire the work of Corot.

Corot belongs to a category of painters, not large, who possess what is called "charm." They do not take themselves too seriously. In them there is nothing of pedantry, and they are perhaps often reproached for their lack of intellectuality. But before one of their canvases we stop involuntarily. It breathes forth so much honesty and simple radiance! It has not been painted by cold-blooded skill, but has painted itself. It is interesting to hear Corot speak about this: "There are days when it is I who paint; in those days the work is bad. The days when it is not I — an angel has come and worked for me; then it is good." The spirit in which the work is done is almost everything.

Broadly speaking, we may divide Corot's landscapes into three classes. The first comprises his early work. It is full of detail, carefully and severely drawn and painted, yet even in the beginning not without charm of color. There are great accuracy, both in values and drawing, and a rare conscientiousness and naïveté of workmanship. Little by little he began to work with more freedom, until among his later productions we have landscapes that may be divided into two classes: the classical and the natural. Of the latter there are many painted directly from nature, and with very few added touches; and these for most people rank among the highest achievements of the painter's brush. Their impression is more direct, and there is a certain *imprévu* quality, a naïveté, that one misses in the classic canvases. These classic canvases, many of them studio pictures, while of great beauty and distinction, are a little cloying in their completeness, a little too perfect in the arrangement of line and mass. They lack the acid note, the discord, that gives an added value to so much sweetness. . . .

Truly Corot's was an enviable existence. With a fine physique and a joyous temperament that enabled him to accept without bitterness the slight recognition that was his for years, his success yet came in time for him to enjoy it. He was adored by the younger painters; and men of the most varied and opposed ideas and practices are as one in their regard for the good Père Corot. He has gained all suffrages, and is indeed the painter of the poets and of all who love nature, not so much for her brilliant and obvious qualities as for her mystery, her poetry, and her charm.

R. A. M. STEVENSON ART JOURNAL: 1889

COROT was a man of the fields; he was no dilettante or connoisseur versed in the galleries of Europe. Alfred Robaut says that he looked little at pictures, and then to please himself at the moment, taking as much stock of a terrible example of what *not* to do as of a crowning monument of art. Indeed, for a man that was to work out his own salvation in style, the good was perhaps more dangerous than the bad picture. His style was made to convey his own impressions, and such a style cannot be taken ready-made. Yet his impressions are consonant with the vision of all those who take a large view of nature. A lifetime of open-air study lies behind his facile and poetical elegance, and you will not easily catch him tripping as a realist.

Many people, some of them painters, accuse Corot of want of finish. By study of his pictures these censors might find themselves dealing with a broader and larger logic of vision than their own. They would find him admirably conscientious in his purpose of modelling the large masses perfectly, and of suggesting the smaller detail only so far as he could do it without sacrifice of what is greater. Others have denied him the gift of color, proclaiming him merely a "tonist." This would seem a pedantic survival of theories of mural decoration. It argues a total misapprehension of the aims and merits of modern painting. People who cannot call a man a colorist unless he knocks them on the head with red, blue, and yellow are, of course, justified in their taste, though wrong in their principles of criticism. As well abuse the great decorators of Italy for not admitting realistic truths incompatible with their art as attack the moderns for not stultifying their new and noble realism of atmosphere by the introduction of bright, impossible tints. Corot was quite sincere in his intention to render the open air, and surely no one denies the reality of open-air colors, or that they are as beautiful, subtle, and varied as the pigments in a color-box or the stuffs in a draper's shop.

There is also decorative beauty in Corot's art, consonant with, and, to my mind, inseparable from, his view of the world. One dare not say how much of his beauty is, as it were, realism sublimed. Your eye embraces his pictures in their entirety, and nothing distracts or worries the attention. A great part of this unity, this harmony, comes from his logical and consistent rendering of atmosphere, the result of his most unusually complete grasp of the field of vision as a whole.

J. BUISSON GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS: 1875

THOSE critics whose turn of mind is unalterably prosaic have sometimes complained that Corot always painted the same landscape. This is not true; what they feel arises from the fact that he applied the same method of what we may call "unification" to the most diverse subjects,—a method personal to himself and only acquired through forty years of effort and struggle, or better phrased, of alliance with nature. The truth is that only when we bring a number of his works together can we fully appreciate how original and various he was. Yet various as these impressions are, they are all similar, but similar only because they are all the work of an artist who brought no formula, no cut-and-dried process, no system, to the observation of nature, but who allowed himself simply to be penetrated and possessed by her. He offered himself as a docile and delicate instrument; he reduced himself to take a purely objective attitude, at once sensitive and indifferent. From this both the extreme unity and the extreme variety of his studies arise.

And such in truth is the secret of the greatness of all masters. They are great because they know how to be impersonal before nature, and thus, and thus only, are enabled to create works truly strong and personal. They are able to penetrate nature's secrets as only such souls can, because of their very disinterestedness. And so, slowly mastering her inner meaning, the elements of nature's poetry are little by little amassed in their minds by a slow and patient process of intellectual gestation which endures sometimes throughout half the artist's life. There comes a day at last, however, when the artist's mind is charged, when the least contact with reality suffices to awake in him a whole world of stored impressions; and then the spectator stands amazed at the result, awestruck by the accumulated fecundity. The children of the painter's brain are born by the dozen, loading the studio; but one and all of them bear clear upon them the double resemblance to nature, who is their mother, and to the great artist, who is their father. The originality of the finished works of such an artist will, often enough, then, be in direct ratio to the naïveté of the rough studies.

Corot's innocence before nature was the gift which he received from the good fairy who, as it were, took him by the collar behind the counter in the draper's shop, and cried, "In spite of all, you *shall* be a landscape painter." Never did he lose this gift, but preserved in his work and in his personality to the end of his life the inexpressible charm of the reunion, in an intelligent creature, arrived at his full development, of science and candor.

To this happy gift of impartial attentiveness, this impersonality, which, in their hours of preparation, is the sovereign faculty of the strong who are content to wait for the moment in which they are to take command, he added another gift which was no less precious,—the instinct for synopsis, the instinct which taught him how to give the whole impression by seizing only those salient points which are necessary to convey it. From this comes the striking unity of his pictures. When that hour struck when the artist, now become a master, was to exercise his own personal domination over things,

Corot showed his power of making a résumé, in the widest and most artistic sense of the word. Then no medium of expression seemed fluent enough to enable him to fix his instinctive poetical conception. His burning thought rushed over the natural forms which served as electrical points of contact for his inspiration, so that it seemed as if the result were merely his inspiration made visible. Never was there like spontaneity. With marvellous rapidity he fixed unerringly upon the essential points, every touch vibrating with inner meaning. There was no confusion anywhere. There is no possible similarity between such an outpouring of genius as this and the facility acquired by mere practice. Such facility results in giving us almost entirely what is superficial and superfluous. Corot gives us nothing but what is essential. Study any one of his pictures whatever, and you will find that the principal thing is always in the right place, that the image speaks, that it burns itself upon the memory.

Corot was a poet, and a modern poet. His was all the subtle charm that comes from the modern liberty to seek in everything, even the humblest, its own intrinsic poetry. In him we may find the least reproachable and the most elevated representative of that sentiment for the daily aspect of nature which is our new birthright in the present era. His title to fame will lie mainly, in spite of all his technical merits and his incomparable naïveté, in his great imagination. Because of his imagination it will be granted to him to sit among the lesser gods of painting.

As for his faults—oh, is it *always* necessary to stifle our delight with "buts" and "ifs"? For once, with thankfulness, let us rest upon the *quid divinum* of his work. Rigor of judgment seems but ingratitude toward such a kindly genius. There are critics enough who can tell us what he lacks, perhaps without considering that had he possessed scientific precision, brilliancy of execution, and a variety of splendor, truly there would have been nothing left to attain for the landscapists who are to come.—ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH.

'COROT' THE ATHENÆUM: 1875

COROT'S art reflected nothing that had gone before, either as regards technical development or pathos; neither in fancy nor style was there anything in his pictures which one could refer to those of another. Confining the remark to paintings of the class associated with his name during the fifteen years that preceded his death, that is to say, within the period since popular fame was thrust upon him, Corot displayed not only an idiosyncrasy at once novel and powerful, but his career afforded the most perfect modern illustration of the difference which exists between style and manner—a difference so enormously important in critical eyes. Within a comparatively narrow range of art and motive,—indeed, so narrow a one that most men thus confined would have sunk into the weakest self-repetition,—Corot exhibited the most unbounded wealth of resource and the richest vein of fancy. It seemed to students that he never could repeat himself; and yet to hasty eyes his works are so much alike that probably not half the persons who take slight note of

what they see can discriminate between the paintings severally, still less can they classify them. Those silvery evenings, with the new moon hanging in the scarce clad branches of the elms, while tender shadows tremble on the sward, and nymphs and satyrs dance to "ditties of no tone," are not very different from faintly roseate dawnings, in which smooth lakes glimmer, and the reflections of the trees grow less mysterious while they darken. . . .

Corot was a landscape painter with the powers of sentiment which are proper to poets. Every touch of his work had a meaning, and seemed like the revelation of a charm. A fine and learned draughtsman, whose exquisite skill in drawing it was customary to ignore because it was rarely subtle, he was a fine colorist in the most delicate sense of the term, and his works are so tender and simple, or so noble and precious, that critics have been at a loss how to compare his art with the labor of others.

The Works of Corot

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PLATES

DANCE OF NYMPHS: EVENING — PRIVATE COLLECTION

COROT'S figures are always best when subordinated to and used to vivify and accentuate a landscape—when they may be considered "*pardessus le marché*," as it were. Corot himself did not realize this, and at every period of his career painted stiff and badly drawn figure pictures. Indeed, he regarded one such, the 'Burning of Sodom,' with its five wooden personages, as his favorite work, and declared that, were his studio on fire, he would rescue it first of all. In this 'Evening Dance of the Nymphs,' however, the figures are wholly charming, accentuating, as they do, the composition, and imbuing the whole scene with an idyllic poetry that recalls Theocritus.

LANDSCAPE — LOUVRE: PARIS

"PERHAPS Corot never more happily seized upon that aspect of nature's variable and changing moods which he was best fitted to express," writes Paul Lafond, "than in this landscape. How exquisitely the light leaves of the tree, with its strong massive trunk and delicate branches, are relieved against the pale glow of the sky! How softly the transparent veil of vapor lies over the masses of verdure reflected in the sleeping waters of the lake! It is all so impalpable, so fairy-like, that we should hardly believe the scene to be reality at all were it not for that slender girl in the foreground plucking the leaves from the bare graceful birch, and the two children gathering dew-sprinkled flowers on the rich carpet of verdure. The whole scene breathes of that morning hour when the first rays of the sun are piercing night's vapors; and as Corot himself has said, 'To really get into my land-

scape you must wait—wait till the mists have cleared a little. Be patient! You can't see the whole of it at first; but gradually, by and by, you will get in; and then I am sure you will be pleased.'"

ORPHEUS GREETING THE MORN — PRIVATE COLLECTION

IT has been said that nowhere is the very essence of morning more truthfully and exquisitely portrayed than in this picture of Corot's, in which Orpheus rapturously hails the approach of day. The golden tone of the picture, the soft radiance of its color, the breadth and delicacy of its execution, as well as the poetry of its inspiration, all combine to make it one of Corot's most beautiful creations. The picture was painted in 1861, and is therefore a work of the master's middle period.

THE BATHERS — PRIVATE COLLECTION

"COROT was fond," writes M. Tocqué, "of, as it were, bidding you follow him out-of-doors in that hour of unreal half-light that precedes the dawn, and stealing from tree-trunk to tree-trunk through the glade, leading you to the borders of some secret pool where, parting the wet screen of leaves that showers down a silver rain of drops, he will show you such a scene as this. Sometimes he plays Actæon, and then the hidden bathers are Diana and her nymphs; sometimes he is but a sylvan swain, and then, as here, they are only rustic girls; but always there is the freshness of morning and of youth and the idyllic quality of pastoral poetry upon the scene."

A ROAD IN SUNSHINE — PRIVATE COLLECTION

IN an often-quoted and wholly delightful letter to a friend, Corot has autobiographically described the landscape-painters' day out-of-doors. He is on the watch with the earliest signs of dawn; but he does not take up his brush until the rising sun has pierced the obscuring mists, and all things shine in the pale, caressing flood of the first light. "Then," he cries, "nature is adorable! I paint! I paint!" But towards noon he lays his palette down. "The sun is hot now; the flowers droop; the birds are silent. We can see too much. Let us go home, to dine, to rest, to dream—to dream of the morning landscape." Not until after the "explosion" of the sunset, which he calls "pretentious and vulgar," not until "the sylphs of evening are come to sprinkle the patient, thirsty flowers with the dew-vapors from their invisible watering-pots," will he sally forth again.

The letter describes Corot's usual practice; and indeed his style, as well as his disposition better suited him to be the painter of nature in her subtler moods at dawn and twilight; but it was neither a lack of power nor the want of appreciation for the charm of full sunlight that prevented him from oftener depicting the "bird-silent hours," as is proved by this poplar-lined 'Road in Sunshine' that shimmers in the heat of noon.

A GUST OF WIND — PRIVATE COLLECTION

IN this picture 'A Gust of Wind' we have an example of one of those rare cases where Corot depicted nature in a turbulent mood. As a rule he avoided such subjects, preferring her calmer and more friendly aspects; but in the force and power with which he has painted the storm-blown trees, the sky covered with swiftly moving clouds, showing here and there a glimpse of blue, the peasant woman struggling with the sudden gust, we see that Corot was not limited in range to those peaceful scenes more compatible with his serenity of disposition.

VILLE D'AVRAY — ROUEN MUSEUM

COROT was accustomed to spend a portion of every year at his summer home in the small hamlet of Ville d'Avray, about ten miles outside of Paris, and it was there that many of his most charming landscapes were painted. In the example here reproduced may be seen, embosomed in trees, the house in which he lived, first with his parents and after their death with the sister to whom he was deeply attached. In the foreground, surrounded by the vaporous foliage of the trees, is the lake he loved to paint.

THE BENT TREE — PRIVATE COLLECTION

"COROT," says R. A. M. Stevenson, "showed the tree in its true essence, and in its true position, amid skies, verdure, water and rocks, or waving grasses. He saw trees soft against the sky as if they were clouds. He himself has said that he should wish you to feel no fears for the birds that might fly through his trees. In too many pictures you feel that they would drop down dead, as if they had struck tin. We may come upon predictions of his soft breadth in handling a close-set clump of foliage, but we can find nothing in the past which foretells his treatment of a light maze of branches with scanty foliage thrown against the sky. The details of such tracery are so subtle and so complex that no human hand can render them, with all their multiplicity, their wonderful softness, their infinite variety of definition, as distinct pre-Raphaelite objects. Such a delicate embroidery must be treated mainly as texture, if it is not to become a stiff and grotesque parody of the supple and waving original. Corot's methods of treating this beautiful appearance in nature have been now accepted by all painters save a few Englishmen. But he also understood the artistic value of a foil. When he painted a delicate single leaf on these vaporous plumes of foliage he did it with as delicate a carefulness as any pre-Raphaelite; and he often chose a motive which gave him a single bare tree (as in the present picture) or a clump of slender outstanding saplings with which to contrast his lace-like towers of foliage."

WILLOWS NEAR ARRAS — PRIVATE COLLECTION

COROT has here drawn, with more precision and care than was usual with him, a group of those trees in which he took particular delight,—"the small round willows that mark the windings of the river," to use his own phrase.

"Among trees," writes Charles Bigot, "Corot did not care to paint the oak, that tree so dear to all artists interested in form, nor the chestnut, nor the elm. His favorites were the aspen, the poplar, the alder, the birch, with its pale leaves and white sinuous stem, and especially the willow, with its feathery foliage."

DANCE OF NYMPHS: MORNING — LOUVRE: PARIS

PAINTED in 1850 and exhibited at the Salon of 1851, this picture for long hung in the gallery of the Luxembourg, whence, after Corot's death, it was transferred to the Louvre. In a sequestered glade and by the light of early morning, nymphs and satyrs celebrate by their dance the rising of the sun, while through the delicate foliage of the trees we have in the background a glimpse of the open country. Ignoring the assumed antagonism between the old and new in art, Corot frequently introduced into his pictures these graceful figures of dancing nymphs, which in his mind were quite consistent with the chosen theme, and certainly in his hands the beauty of the result justified the experiment.

THE PRINCIPAL PAINTINGS OF COROT IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

TO compile a complete list of the paintings of Corot giving their present locations, would be an almost impossible task; and, even were it undertaken, such a list would become inaccurate shortly after its publication. Corot produced a great number of works; he often duplicated a subject; and so repeatedly gave his pictures such indefinite names—"Landscape" and "Morning," for examples—as to make individual identification by title very difficult. Moreover, the greater number of his pictures, and many of the most important of them, are now in private possession, and change hands with every sale. Under these circumstances, it has seemed advisable to list here only those examples now in public collections, which, besides being less liable to change of location, are generally accessible.

FRANCE. BORDEAUX MUSEUM: Diana's Bath — CHANTILLY MUSEUM: Concert Champêtre — DOUAI MUSEUM: Italian Landscape — DUNKERQUE MUSEUM: Landscape — LANGRES MUSEUM: Christ in the Garden of Olives — LILLE MUSEUM: A Fête — LYONS MUSEUM: Landscape — MANS, LE, MUSEUM: Ville d'Avray — MARSEILLES MUSEUM: The Italian Tyrol — METZ MUSEUM: Environs of Florence — MONTPELIER MUSEUM: Landscape — NANTES MUSEUM: Democritus and the Abderites; Sunset after Rain — PARIS, CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS DE CHARDONNET: Baptism of Christ — PARIS, LOUVRE: Colosseum at Rome; View of the Roman Forum; Dante and Virgil; Hagar in the Wilderness; Landscape (Plate II); Dance of Nymphs, Morning (Plate X); Souvenir of Castelgandolfo — RHEIMS MUSEUM: The Lake; The Lake of Albano — ROCHELLE, LA, MUSEUM: The First Step; Environs of Geneva — ROSNY, CHURCH: Flight into Egypt — ROUEN MUSEUM: Ville d'Avray (Plate VII); The Ponds at Ville d'Avray — SAINT-LÔ MUSEUM: Homer and the Shepherds — SEMUR MUSEUM: The Orchard — TOULOUSE MUSEUM: The Shepherds' Star — VILLE D'AVRAY, CHURCH: St. Jerome — ITALY. FLORENCE, UFFIZI GALLERY: Portrait of Corot — UNITED STATES. BALTIMORE, WALTERS GALLERY: St. Sebastian; The Evening Star; Early Spring — BOSTON, ART MUSEUM: Dante and Virgil; Forest of

Fontainebleau; Près Gisors; Three Landscapes; Nymphs Bathing (unfinished); Portrait of the Sculptor Rude — CHICAGO, ART INSTITUTE: Four Landscapes; Figure of a Woman; Just before Sunrise; Figure in Landscape — NEW YORK, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM: The Moat; Ville d'Avray — PHILADELPHIA, ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS: Landscape — WASHINGTON, CORCORAN GALLERY: Wood-Gatherers.

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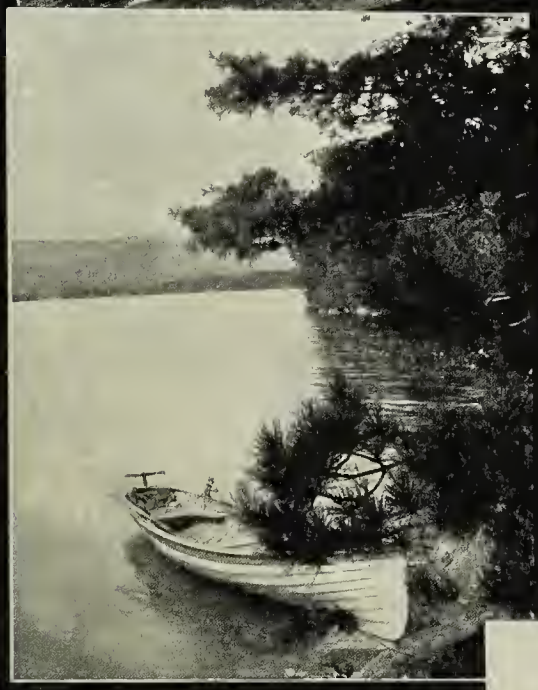

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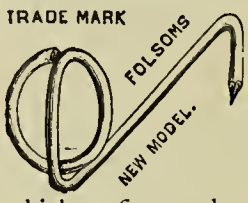

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